

Coming Out Is Hard When You Don't Know There's A Closet

I often receive questions from people about the transition from identifying as straight to identifying as gay. Whether it's the 55-year-old guy who suddenly finds himself looking at the men in his adult videos or the married woman wondering if she's gay, such in-between places can be uncomfortable for those involved.

I try to take these questions with extreme gentleness. These are the times when allies can be made or broken. For example, I received a question from a man who had been married to a woman for 26 years when she fell in love with another woman. He never had a clue she was gay. He bravely asked, "Is it common for lesbians to build long-term relationships with straight men? Do they do it to have kids and then leave? I know I should ask her—but there is still tension about the split."

That's not unheard of—I mean, it was an Oprah special. But it's still tough.

In response: There's no chapter in the lesbian playbook about how to snare a straight man for the purposes of procreating. Lesbians are a practical people. It would be much easier to go to the sperm bank.

Truly, some women aren't aware they are lesbian or bisexual until they meet a woman who rocks their world and their understanding of attraction. It can be a total surprise to



ask a gay

BY KRISTIN FLICKINGER

My generation of lesbians (thirtyish) grew up in a shifting society, where the idea of being in a committed relationship with another woman wasn't an impossible one.

both them and their partners. Some women think it's normal to not want to kiss a male partner or be neutral about, even "grossed out" by sex with a man. It may sound crazy, but I've heard it described by "straight" friends.

Some women are willing to ignore the fact that they are gay in order to try to live the white-picket-fence dream of having a family and a husband and a home. It's the dream we're taught and the default we start with. After all, most of our parents are straight.

I believe there are generational things going on as well.

Generally speaking, my generation of lesbians (thirtyish) grew up in a shifting society,

where the idea of being in a committed relationship with another woman wasn't an impossible one. It was often presented as "not what I'd want for my daughter, but at least it's love."

Still, I remember being in high school and deciding not to be gay—looking at my guy friends and making a list of whom I could most stand to spend my life with, knowing I'd never be attracted to them. I wasn't thinking about building a strategic relationship. I was thinking that I liked them—loved them, even—and that I'd be able to make it work. They weren't some suckers I thought I could dupe. They were loving, beautiful men whose friendship was strong enough that I thought I could have a lifelong emotional relationship with them—even though I was in a long-term relationship with a woman at the time.

The generation older than mine grew up in a very different world, one where the idea of two women living together was a near impossibility reserved for spinster sisters or widows. Relationships between women were hidden, deviant. Gay sex was illegal in many states.

Nearly everything around us still screams

that it would be easier to fit in. Books, movies, TV shows, magazines, cocktail parties, co-workers, all point to the "normal" straight relationships that are the generally assumed goal. Sometimes the idea of trying to live that dream can be enough to convince people who would otherwise live as gay to push down the essence of who they are to try to be "normal." Having a shot at a patently accepted life with someone you love—especially someone who is your best friend—can be tempting, even if you know you're not attracted to them.

But society is changing. And that means that lesbians who have in the past chosen to try to live a straight life now dwell in a more accepting society. And that can allow all of us the beautiful freedom to live our lives fully and honestly. For the women who find themselves in inauthentic relationships with men, however, the transition can be painful for them and for their partners. I'm grateful the current generation will suffer less of these painful transitions as they are able to be themselves more fully from the beginning.

It's an incredibly hard thing to be yourself when you're gay—but it's even harder not to.

In the end, who we are will always come to the surface. When you're able to talk with your ex about the whats and whys, you may find that when she married you, she married her best friend. And nobody wants to hurt their best friend. ☺

KRISTIN FLICKINGER also offers guidance to lesbians-in-training at asktbe-gay.com.

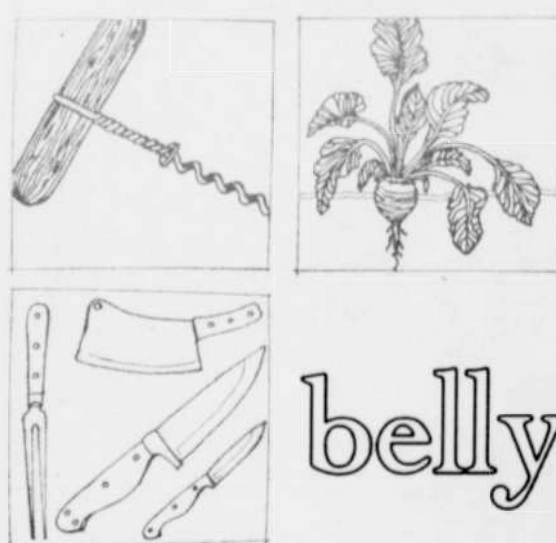
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